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2001

## The times of our lives: women, leisure and postgraduate research

Coralie McCormack  
*University of Wollongong*

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and postgraduate research

Coralie McCormack  
University of Wollongong

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# The Times of Our Lives: Women, Leisure and Postgraduate Research

A thesis submitted in fulfilment of the  
requirements for the award of the degree

**DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY**

**from**

**UNIVERSITY OF WOLLONGONG**

**by**

**Coralie McCormack, BA (Hons), Dip. Ed., Dip. Urban and Regional Planning,  
Grad. Cert. in Higher Education, Masters in Education (Research)**

**FACULTY OF EDUCATION  
2001**

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## **THESIS CERTIFICATION**

I, Coralie McCormack, declare that this thesis, submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the award of Doctor of Philosophy, in the Faculty of Education, University of Wollongong, is wholly my own work unless otherwise referenced or acknowledged. This document has not been submitted for qualifications at another academic institution.

Coralie McCormack

1<sup>st</sup> June 2001

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## Abstract

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This study explores the interconnections between leisure and postgraduate research in the lives of six women. The author and the text draw the reader into interactions to create meanings as the women tell their stories. The value of this thesis derives from its time perspective — the simultaneous view of the women's everyday lives 'across time' (across each woman's lifetime) and 'in time' (during her time as a postgraduate researcher).

This research develops and documents a process I term *storying stories* as an alternative way to approach and re-present interview transcripts. In this three-stage process interview transcripts were viewed through multiple lenses — active listening, narrative processes, language, context and moments — to highlight both the individuality and the complexity of a life. The views highlighted by these lenses were then used to write interpretive stories. Finally the interpretive stories were brought together to form a personal experience narrative. These narratives portray how each woman resolved competing demands on her identity to reflexively construct a sense of self over time.

Each woman's process of *storying leisure* revealed a more detailed picture of leisure as 'My Time' — time just for me — than has been revealed in the literature to date. The narratives highlighted the storylines (cultural fictions) each woman drew on to construct her leisure around the tension between 'time for me' and 'time for others'. Some women identified and challenged the existing storylines to make time and create spaces for leisure in their busy postgraduate lives.

The innovative process of *storying stories* revealed that postgraduate study itself could be experienced as leisure, or at least tantalisingly leisure-like. Also revealed were the structures and strategies each woman drew upon to balance her life in this context. Some women's stories challenged the pattern of narrative closure suggested by the storylines most often available to women postgraduate researchers. This thesis provides the personal and collective knowledge of the postgraduate experience that is missing from both the texts currently available to postgraduates as well as from universities' postgraduate support programs.

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# Acknowledgments

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This thesis is not my story alone. Nor is it a story of my time as a PhD student only. It is the story of a life’s journey, a journey in the company of many others.

There since the beginning have been my parents. There to instill a love of learning and to provide at great personal and financial cost the pathways on which I could pursue learning. Unfortunately, only my father is here to be with me as this stage of my journey comes to a close. My mother though I am sure is watching.

There for the last twenty five years have been my partner and his family. A partner and family who valued life-long learning and who encouraged me to question and listened and valued my opinions as I grew confident enough to express them.

There for the last twenty and sixteen years respectively, have been our daughters, Keirin and Callie. Growing from noisy babies to beautiful confident young women.

In the last ten years as my journey took me down an academic pathway there have been, and continue to be, some remarkable friends and colleagues who have contributed in multiple ways to my personal and professional growth.

Academic Colleagues

Sue Johnston	Di Adams
Barbara Pamphilon	Juliana Broda
Penny Cameron	Kim Pollock
John Dearn	Sharon van Reyk
Ina Te Wiata	Val Clifford
Claire Atkinson	Peter Donnan
Jim Clough	Ron Traill

A special friend and squash partner  
Penny Cameron

My tennis partners and sanity savers  
Anne Campbell

Penny Cameron	Val Faulkner
Kim Pollock	Val Clifford

## *Prologue*

To each of the women who shared their postgraduate journeys — Anna, Barbara, Carla, Charlotte, Grace, Jan, Judy, Julie, Lisa, Lydia, Mary, Miranda, Nell, Phoebe and Willa — a special thank you. You have all been inspirational.

During my time as a PhD student there have been two women whose contribution has been particularly special — my supervisors — Jan Wright and Chris Fox. Their contribution has been special because they knew about the dance of supervision as Jan called it. A dance where no one person is in control and co-operation makes the whole thing happen.

To all those who have accompanied me on my journey there are two words that come deep from within me. A thesis is over 100, 000 words. Thank you is just two words, but these two words carry with them more than 100,000 words ever could.

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*Bringing this Journey to a Close (for now)*

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## Setting the Scene for the Stories to Follow

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Shaping a life  
 Shapes of a life  
 As we tell our stories  
 We shape our lives  
 With each retelling  
 There is reshaping  
 As we compose the narrative shapes of our life.

“We live in a time of rapidly expanding awareness of the possible shapes of women’s lives” (Bateson, 1997, p.vii). Stories of women’s everyday experience of leisure and postgraduate research<sup>1</sup> have, however, been slow to emerge. Few researchers have accompanied women on their postgraduate journeys to draw from their stories individual and collective aspects of their experience to share with other women yet to travel their postgraduate paths. The women who share their stories here are among the growing number of women traversing a landscape already familiar to males — the postgraduate landscape.

Carla, Grace, Lydia, Mary, Anna and Coralie — the six women postgraduates sharing their stories in this research — were born in and have lived in Australia, although some of them have also lived overseas. They differ in their ages and stages of life and career.<sup>2</sup> The research topics they pursue are located in the humanities, the social and the physical sciences. Some enrolled in Masters research programs, others in PhD programs. All began their postgraduate study with a desire, for some it was a dream, to know — to know more about educating midwives, environmentally sustainable campus lifestyles, how parents of pre-school children feel about their child’s pre-school experience, or women’s experience of leisure and postgraduate research. And in knowing, they wanted to make a difference in the lives of others and the spaces/places they live — by caring for the environment on our university campuses, by improving pre-school children’s learning environments, or making a difference in women’s experience of postgraduate research or in midwifery

education in our universities and in the community. Some also harboured a need to do postgraduate study, sometimes imposed from outside, at other times a dream from within, to achieve and challenge themselves through postgraduate research. I am one of the women sharing her story.

Research, like almost everything in life, has autobiographical roots.

(Seidman, 1991, p.24)

Research is initiated by someone, a real person, who in the context of their individual lived experience, sets out to make sense of a certain aspect of life (sometimes their own life) which has a particular interest for them. It is the researcher's need to know — to make sense — which plants the seed for the research question. The question that particularly interests this researcher is:

How does the way women construct and experience leisure change  
over their postgraduate experience?

Given this guiding question, my interest is in how each woman talks about and experiences leisure over her lifetime and then during her time as a postgraduate student.<sup>3</sup> Also of interest is the question: What does each woman draw upon to construct these understandings?

Researchers have suggested that leisure is part of the fabric of women's everyday lives.<sup>4</sup> Hence, when women tell stories about leisure they are also talking about their lives. So in trying to make sense of leisure in their lives women are at the same time trying to make sense of their lives, in this research, their lives as postgraduate research students. "[E]ducation, experience and life are inextricably intertwined" (Dewey, 1989, in Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p.xxiii). For this reason, the way each woman talks about and experiences her time as a postgraduate student and the understandings she draws on to make sense of this time of her life are of interest in this research.

As one of the women sharing her story, my selves as researcher and postgraduate student are not distanced from this research but intertwined with it as living practice.

Conceptualising research as living practice means the construction of my research quest comes from within rather than being imposed from without by a particular research paradigm or tradition. Such a perspective on research (life) fashions its principles from multiple sources — from the narrative study of lives<sup>5</sup> from feminists,<sup>6</sup> from poststructuralists<sup>7</sup> and from my autobiography and the biographies of those whose life threads weave in and out of my personal life tapestry.

Research from this perspective explores individuals' understandings of their experience in the context of their everyday lives. It assumes these understandings are constructed and reconstructed through a process of storying<sup>8</sup> — “human experience is basically storied experience ... humans live out stories and are storytelling organisms” (Connelly & Clandinin, 1994, p.4046). Knowledge constructed through this process of storying stories is situated, transient, partial and provisional; characterised by multiple voices, perspectives, truths and meanings. It demands a tolerance for paradox, contradiction and ambiguity. Such a research framework values transformation at a personal level, individual subjectivity and the researcher's voice. Research within this framework strives to be both ethical and accountable.

For storytellers, sharing stories of personal experience is a balancing act, a process of choosing what to move from the private to the public. It is balancing a desire to share against the fear of exposure; balancing voice and silence. Some stories are included and others silenced through exclusion. Narratives are always purposeful and particular (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Hatch & Wisniewski, 1995a, 1995b; Mishler, 1999). Each woman's narrative, and the stories that compose it, are particular reconstructions, particular to the position from which she views the world and the questions she asks of it. Narratives are also purposeful reconstructions reflecting the purpose for which they were composed.

One of the questions often asked of a narrative is whether the voices heard are ‘representative’ and speak ‘the truth’. Research as living practice cannot be a technical activity seeking objective knowledge separated from its social, political, economic and historical context. It is to its core subjective and situated. As suggested by Mary Bateson (1997) stories cannot be read “as if they were idealized courtroom testimony, the much abused ‘whole truth and nothing but the truth,’ for this is not

attainable” (p.viii). ‘Truth’ in this context is “deeply ethical, open ended and conflictual, performance, and audience based, and always personal, biographical, political, structural and historical” (Denzin, 1997, p.266). It opens to the reader opportunities to “live their way into” (Denzin, 1994, p.506) the stories they read.

Having stories of our own makes it worthwhile.

(Bloom, 1996, p.193)

Stories help us make sense of our lives because they both reflect, and are constitutive of, experience. For individuals, stories act as mirrors — we learn about ourselves — and windows, a way of looking into the past, present and future experiences of others (Jalongo, Isenberg & Gerbracht, 1995). Stories as windows and mirrors into the self allow us to look from multiple perspectives at the multiple views the windows and mirrors highlight, recognising that there may be other mirrors and windows that we are not looking through.

Individual Voices, Individual Stories

Collective Voices, Collective Stories

The simultaneous mirror/window qualities of stories provides the reader “with the reflective space necessary to reimagine” their own lives (Neumann & Peterson, 1997b, p.8). Stories help readers see into themselves, to see what they may not have seen previously, or to see the familiar through different eyes. Each reader can see the discourses or fictions in which s/he is positioned and how they position her/him. And through reimagining, they can see the possibility of constructing alternative stories of their experience — stories that move her/him out of the confines of the narrative structures represented by the cultural storylines of the comedy, tragedy, romance and satire. Alternative stories can do this by changing the pattern of narrative structure by writing beyond the endings made available by the master storylines. Narratives that write beyond these endings refuse the ‘happily ever after’ ending, the ‘I did it my way’ ending or the ‘I struggled against adversity and overcame’ ending. Such stories open the possibility of alternative positions and so the potential to counteract, refuse, modify or go beyond the experience of the other (Davies, 1991, 1993). My hope is

that the mirror/window quality of stories will draw you, the reader, into reflective conversations and contemplation of your experience.

One of the purposes of narrative research is to have other readers raise questions about their practices ... question their own stories ... to foster reflection, storying and restorying for readers.

[Clandinin, 1992, pp.135–36, in Laidlaw, 1997, p.11]

As you journey through the following chapters, you will engage with my personal writing in the form of poems, journal entries and short stories.<sup>9</sup> By personal writing I mean writing that presents autobiographical and introspective material as reflexive analysis of my experience as researcher and postgraduate student. Interwoven with my personal writing is my academic writing, my third person voice.

The story is not all mine nor told by me alone.

[Le Guin, 1985, p.317, in Bloom, 1996, p.179]

Alongside my multiple voices are heard the voices of Carla, Anna, Lydia, Grace and Mary as they tell their stories. In her stories each woman also speaks in multiple voices. Most often she speaks for herself as an individual (I — her embodied self).<sup>10</sup> At other times she speaks for others she perceives to be like herself (we — the embodied other) and as the anonymous representative of a group (you).

[W]e speak — or sing — our selves as a chorus of voices, not just as the tenor or soprano soloist. (Mishler, 1999, p.8)

My personal writing is integral to this thesis. Without it, it is not my story. For, when all is said and done, this thesis is my story. I chose the topic, constructed the research framework, and chose the form of re-presentation of the voices of those who travelled with me on my quest.

So, when my quest comes to its end (at least for now) how will I know if it has all been worthwhile? Research is worthwhile when it contributes multiple knowledge

possibilities: personal practical knowledge, collective knowledge, and process knowledge. I intend this research to be worthwhile.

I research to make a difference  
In my own life  
In the lives of those I research with  
In the lives of those who read our stories.

I write for my life  
And of my life  
And for and of the lives of other women  
Postgraduate women yet to come  
As well as those I share this journey with.

From the interweaving of the multiple voices in this research emerge multiple narratives. The narrative of my personal experience as a researcher contributes process knowledge — knowledge of educational research methodology.<sup>11</sup> It tells the stories of my research choices, questions, dilemmas and decisions — decisions to locate the research within a narrative inquiry framework and decisions to develop a research process I've called storying stories. This process sees stories as a way of recording personal experience, a way of writing about those experiences and a way for participants and readers to respond to research. It is a process that views the participant's experiences through multiple lenses and then uses the views highlighted by these lenses to write interpretive stories.

The process of storying stories is my response to calls, particularly by feminist leisure researchers (for example, Burden, 1993; Henderson et al., 1996), to “develop and use methods of research which make visible the experiences of women in leisure” (Burden, 1993, p.167). Narrative inquiry is new to the fields of both leisure studies and postgraduate education. Also new to these fields of research is the inclusion of my story as a postgraduate student as one of the stories told in the research. “Leisure researchers lag behind colleagues in other social sciences in conveying intersubjectivity in their research reports” (Glancy, 1993, p.45).



Within this thesis are six personal experience narratives — the narratives of Carla, Grace, Lydia, Mary, Anna and Coralie. The interpretive stories, comprising each woman's narrative, contribute personal practical knowledge. Personal practical knowledge is "knowledge which is experiential, embodied and based on the narrative of experience" (Clandinin, 1985, p.363). Personal knowledge, as the term suggests, is "constituted by the stories about experience we usually keep to ourselves" (Grumet, 1991, p.70). In this research it is knowledge of how each woman talks about leisure in her life and how she constructs and reconstructs this understanding over her time as a postgraduate student. The women's narratives are also stories of their individual personal experience as a postgraduate student. Nested within each woman's narrative are stories about the rewards and the many life challenges she negotiated as a postgraduate researcher.

Looking across the narratives and across time are the collective stories highlighting the commonalities and differences of our experiences (collective knowledge). These collective stories recount stories about time — stories of particular points 'in time' and stories 'across time', stories about leisure time, stories about postgraduate time, stories of women constantly making choices and reflecting on those choices. They are stories that construct and reconstruct a reflexive sense of self over time. Collective knowledge is a narrative of the times of our lives.<sup>12</sup>

What is common across the women's narratives is the tension between leisure as 'time for me' and 'time for others'. Constructed around this tension, leisure is experienced as 'My Time' — time just for me. 'My Time' is time to 'take care of my self' or to 'grow my self'. Time each woman acknowledges is important to her sense of well-being. As they story their leisure over their time as postgraduate students some women identify and challenge the existing storylines available to women to 'make time' and create spaces in their busy postgraduate lives for leisure as 'My Time'.

The narrative shapes the women composed of their postgraduate time were not formed around the 'happily ever after' narrative, though for some women their narrative includes the successful examination of their thesis. Nor were the narratives the 'I tried but failed' narrative of withdrawal from postgraduate study often cited in

the postgraduate literature. The collective narrative tells the story of how each of the women negotiated life's contingencies, turning points, tensions and contradictions to find her own distinctive way of composing the narrative shape of her life. What was common across most of the narratives was that these shapes emerged as enabling fictions that venture beyond the endings of the master narratives.

## *Attention Reader!*

You are invited to participate in a process of storying stories.

As an interactive reader<sup>3</sup> of the first five chapters I invite you:

To reflect on your personal research journeys

To question and reflect on my research journey

As I set the scene through these chapters

For the stories to follow.

In Chapter 1 you will make connections with:

Existing stories of women's experiences

In the field of leisure studies.

Stories which until recently

Have been about someone else's leisure.

And in the field of postgraduate study.

Stories which for women

Have been stories of someone else's place and space.

Chapter 2 introduces my research landscape:

Viewing this landscape from afar

Before focusing on its landforms in detail.

The nature of research

The nature of the research process

The nature of ethical and accountable research.

Chapter 3 continues to focus on the details of the research landscape.

Here the focus is on the process of recording stories of experience.

Connecting with participants who will tell their stories

Preparing for our conversations

Conducting our conversations

Re-presenting our conversations.

The focus moves in Chapters 4 and 5 to

The process of writing stories of experience.

Viewing interview transcripts through multiple lenses

Developing interpretive stories using the views highlighted by  
these lenses

And illustrating this process in action

Through excerpts from my conversations with Anna.

As an interactive reader I invite you in Chapter 6

To interact with the stories of

Anna, Carla, Mary,

Lydia, Grace and Coralie.

To ask questions of yourself and the stories you read:

To what extent is this story your story?

To what extent is it different from your story?

To engage with multiple stories within a story.

Stories of leisure,

Stories of postgraduate study,

Stories of life.

Stories written as the outcome of a process of storying stories.

As an interactive reader I invite you in the final two chapters:

To look with me

As I draw from the individual stories

A collective narrative of leisure and postgraduate experience.

A narrative about the times of our lives.

And as you read this narrative ask yourself again:

To what extent is this my story?

To what extent is it different from my story?

As an interactive reader the invitation in the Postscript is:

To become a storyteller.

To begin to story your stories

By writing your story

And sharing that story with other readers.

**Let the Journey Begin!**

<sup>1</sup> The terms postgraduate, postgraduate study and postgraduate research used in this thesis refer to research at Masters level which involves at least 66% of the overall credit point value of the program being devoted to a research project or thesis or Doctoral level or to Professional Doctorate programs by research (University of Canberra Higher Degrees Committee, 1999, Section 21).

<sup>2</sup> Carla is a part-time Masters by Research student in a management faculty. She is in her thirties and employed fulltime in the Commonwealth Public Service. Grace is a midwife in her forties undertaking a part-time Masters by Research degree. Lydia is a part-time Masters by Research student, employed fulltime. She is in her forties and has a background in education. Mary is a full-time Research Masters student in her thirties with a design background. Anna is a full-time Masters by Research student in her twenties with an undergraduate degree in environmental science. Coralie is a part-time PhD student in an education faculty. She is in her forties and is employed full-time as an academic staff developer.

<sup>3</sup> With this guiding question in mind I spoke with each woman several times over the time she was enrolled as a postgraduate student. Our first conversation took place as each woman began her postgraduate study and the final conversation as her postgraduate experience was coming to a close. The number of conversations with each woman varied depending on the type of postgraduate research she was undertaking (Masters, Professional Doctorate or PhD) and on her mode of study (full-time or part-time). The number of conversations with each woman ranged from two to four. Conversations were held over a period of four years beginning in 1997 and concluding in 2000. Conversations lasted between one and a half and two and a half hours.

<sup>4</sup> See for example: Bella, 1989, 1992; Betschild & Simmons, 1998; Deem, 1986, 1999; Green, Hebron & Woodward, 1990; Henderson et al., 1996; Kelly & Kelly, 1994; McCormack, 1995a; Rojek, 1995; Wimbush & Talbot, 1988.

<sup>5</sup> See for example: Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Cortazzi, 1993; Hatch & Wisniewski, 1995a; Lieblich & Josselson, 1994, 1997; Lieblich, Tuval-Mashiach & Zilber, 1998; Mishler, 1999; Polkinghorne, 1988, 1995, 1997; Riessman, 1993; Sarbin, 1986; Tierney & Lincoln, 1997; Van Manen, 1990; Witherell & Noddings, 1991.

<sup>6</sup> See for example: Bowles & Duelli Klein, 1983; Gluck & Patai, 1991; Lather, 1991a, 1991b; Maguire, 1987; Maynard & Purvis, 1994; Ribbens & Edwards, 1998; Stanley & Wise, 1983, 1993; Westkott, 1979.

<sup>7</sup> See for example: Davies, 1991, 1992, 1993, 1994; Lather, 1991a, 1991b; Weedon, 1987; Weeks, 1998.

<sup>8</sup> Jerome Bruner (1987) suggests that telling one's life as a story seems to be universal across cultures. However, stories also "capture the specific theories in a society which concern what is possible in a life, and such narratives will include particular plots, characters and time sequences" (Mann, 1992, p.274). Stories are plotted in a particular social cultural context.

<sup>9</sup> As you have already begun to do in this chapter. Where the font changes and there is no acknowledgment, then this writing is my personal voice.

<sup>10</sup> I would like to acknowledge the work of Janice Morse (1999) in alerting me to the possibility of describing multiple voices in this way through her keynote address to the International Conference of the Association for Qualitative Research: *Issues of Rigour in Qualitative Research*, 8–10 July 1999. Duxton Hotel Melbourne, Victoria, Australia.

<sup>11</sup> Narrative inquiry is a dynamic rather than a static process. My approach is not to define narrative inquiry but rather "to show you" in a similar way to that adopted by Jean Clandinin and Michael Connelly (2000) in their recent text on narrative inquiry, "what it is by creating a definition contextually" (p.xiii) by recounting in detail my process in Chapters 2, 3, 4 and 5 in 'theory' and in 'practice' before you come to the outcomes of the research process (Chapters 6, 7 and 8). The detail presented in the early chapters will assist you as reader to journey with me across my research landscape and so help you live your way into the stories written as the outcome of my process of storying stories by seeing how they were constructed. My hope also is that this level of detail will assist you on your personal narrative inquiry journey.

<sup>12</sup> I use the words 'our lives' deliberately to indicate that Anna, Carla, Grace, Lydia, and Mary's stories and Coralie's stories as researcher and as postgraduate student are constructed in this thesis.

<sup>13</sup> In common with M. Sarup (1989) I believe “reading has lost its status as a passive consumption of product” (p.3). The stories in this thesis are not ‘fodder’ to be received passively and consumed unquestioningly. Art Bochner and Carolyn Ellis (1996) suggest readers, rather than adopting the role of spectators, be open to “feel, care and desire” as they read (p.24). As an interactive reader of this thesis this opportunity is yours.